IN THE CLAIMS:

Cancel claims 1-14 and add new claims as follows:

1-14. (Canceled).

15. (New) A method of searching conversations, comprising:

receiving a search query;

identifying a conversation relevant to the search query, the conversation having one or more messages sharing a common set of characteristics that meet predefined criteria and a respective conversation identifier; and

returning the conversation as a search result to the search query.

16. (New) The method of claim 15, wherein the identifying the conversation includes identifying a first message relevant to the search query.

17. (New) The method of claim 16, further comprising associating the first message to the conversation based at least in part on a subject of the message and information other than the subject of the message.

18. (New) The method of claim 17, further comprising associating the first message to the conversation based in part on information other than a normalized version of the subject of the message.

19. (New) The method of claim 16, further comprising associating the first message to the conversation based at least in part on a subject of the message and information other than one or both of a references field and an in-reply-to field.

20. (New) A method of searching messages, comprising:

searching a message repository to identify one or more messages relevant to a search query, wherein each identified message is associated with a respective conversation of a plurality of conversations, each conversation comprising one or more messages sharing a common set of characteristics that meet predefined criteria, and having a respective conversation identifier;

identifying the respective conversation identifiers of the conversations associated with the one or more identified messages;

creating a list of one or more conversations, each of the conversations in the list corresponding to a respective identified conversation identifier; and

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producing at least a portion of the list of one or more conversations as the search result.

21. (New) The method of claim 20, further comprising associating the first message to the conversation based in part on information other than a subject of the message.

22. (New) The method of claim 20, further comprising associating the first message to the conversation based in part on information other than a normalized version of the subject reference of the message.

23. (New) A method of processing messages, comprising:

receiving a message;

associating a unique message id with the message;

associating the message to a respective conversation according to a predefined set of criteria;

storing an association between the message id and the respective conversation in a database structure.

24. (New) The method claim 23, wherein the predefined criteria includes a temporal relationship between the message and one or more messages then-associated the respective conversation.

25. (New) A method of processing messages, comprising:

receiving an message;

associating the message with a conversation of a plurality of conversations, each conversation having a respective conversation identifier and comprising one or more messages;

storing information from the message in an index;

storing information from the message in a data structure corresponding to the respective conversation identifier;

searching the index to identify one or more messages relevant to a search query;

identifying from the data structure a list of conversations, the list being at least a subset of conversations to which the relevant messages are associated; and

producing the list of conversations as the search result.

26.   (New) The method of claim 25, wherein the associating includes associating the message to the conversation based in part on information other than a subject reference of the message.

27.   (New) The method of claim 25, wherein the associating includes associating the message to the conversation based in part on information other than a normalized version of the subject reference of the message.

28.   (New) The method of claim 25, wherein the associating includes associating the message to the conversation based in part on information other than one or both of a references field and an in-reply-to field of the message.

29.   (New) A conversation-based message system, comprising:
     a message store that stores messages, each message having associated information, including conversation information;
     a conversation matching module that matches at least one of a plurality of incoming messages to a respective conversation, the respective conversation having a respective conversation identifier and at least one message;
     a conversation search unit that returns a list of conversations in response to a search query; and
     a return unit that transmits the list of conversations.

30.   (New) The method of claim 29, wherein the conversation matching module includes a list module that searches the message store to identify one or more messages relevant to the search query, identifies the respective conversation identifiers to which the one or more identified messages are respectively associated, and creates a list of the conversations associated with the respective conversation identifiers.

31.   (New) The conversation-based message system of claim 29, further comprising a message receiving unit that receives the plurality of messages.

32.   (New) A computer program product, for use with a computer system, the computer program product comprising:
     instructions for receiving a search query;
     instructions for identifying a conversation relevant to the search query, the conversation having one or more messages sharing a common set of characteristics that meet predefined criteria and a respective conversation identifier; and

instructions for returning the conversation as a search result to the search query.

33. (New) The computer program product of claim 32, wherein the instructions for identifying the conversation include instructions for identifying a first message relevant to the search query.

34. (New) The computer program product of claim 33, further comprising instructions for associating the first message to the conversation based at least in part on a subject of the message and information other than the subject of the message.

35. (New) The computer program product of claim 34, further comprising instructions for associating the first message to the conversation based in part on information other than a normalized version of the subject of the message.

36. (New) The computer program product of claim 34, further comprising instructions for associating the first message to the conversation based at least in part on a subject of the message and information other than one or both of a references field and an in-reply-to field.

37. (New) A computer program product, for use in conjunction with a computer system, for searching messages, comprising:

instructions for searching a message repository to identify one or more messages relevant to a search query, wherein each identified message is associated with a respective conversation of a plurality of conversations, each conversation comprising one or more messages and having a respective conversation identifier;

instructions for identifying conversation identifiers of the conversations associated with the identified messages;

instructions for creating a list of one or more conversations, each of the one or more conversations corresponding to a respective identified conversation identifier; and

instructions for producing the list of conversations as the search result.

38. (New) A system for searching messages, comprising:

means for receiving an message;

means for associating the message with a conversation of a plurality of conversations, each conversation having a respective conversation identifier, and wherein each conversation comprises one or more messages;

means for storing information from the message in an index;

means for storing in a data structure corresponding to the respective conversation identifier information from the message;

means for searching the index to identify one or more messages that relevant to a search query;

means for identifying from the data structure a list including at least a subset of conversations to which the one or more identified messages are associated; and
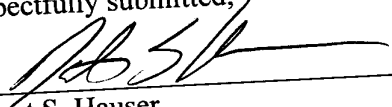
means for producing the list of conversations as the search result.

39.   (New) The method of claim 38, wherein the respective conversation identifier is based in part on information other than a subject reference of the electronic message.

40.   (New) The method of claim 38, wherein the respective conversation identifier is based in part on information other than a normalized version of the subject reference of the electronic message.

Respectfully submitted,

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